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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [GB](#) [KDEM](#)
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH OPPOSITION LEADER MAMBOUNDOU

REF: A. LIBREVILLE 00025
[1](#)B. LIBREVILLE 0045

Classified By: Ambassador Barrie Walkley for
reason 1.4 b and d

[1](#)1. On February 06, Ambassador Walkley met with Pierre Mamboundou -- leader of the UPG, the largest of Gabon's opposition political parties -- to discuss the opposition agenda and relations with President Omar Bongo. Mamboundou said the UPG and the other opposition parties are united in refusing to accept ministerial positions in Bongo's government unless certain conditions are met.

[1](#)2. (C) Mamboundou said that on January 4 Bongo met him privately at the Presidency and offered him a position in the government (Ref A). On January 11, Mamboundou presented Bongo with a document outlining the opposition response, which essentially involves five elements: 1. the cabinet should be much smaller (17 ministers maximum); 2. the Prime Minister rather than the President should preside over cabinet meetings; 3. the government should be focused on specific, achievable results; 4. an economic and social "state of emergency" should be declared; 5. an economic "Marshall plan" should be developed. If these conditions are accepted, according to Mamboundou, the opposition parties will join the government. Mamboundou has not heard from Bongo since presenting him the document on January 11. (FYI: Bongo announced a new government on January 28, made up of fifty ministers and no opposition members. Ref B.)

[1](#)3. (C) Mamboundou said that he has met with Bongo four times since leaving the South African embassy (where he had sought sanctuary after a raid on his premises) in April 2006. The first meeting (at Mamboundou's request) was to secure assurances for his personal safety. The other three meetings were at Bongo's request: one to solicit Mamboundou's views on Mbanie Island and the territorial dispute with Equatorial Guinea, one to discuss the decision to award the Belinga iron concession to China, and the third one being the meeting mentioned above in para 2.

[1](#)4. (C) COMMENT: As Mamboundou readily admits, Bongo does not need the participation of the opposition parties in order to govern; however, their inclusion in the cabinet would offer a cosmetic "government of national unity." We find it revealing that Bongo should have sought out Mamboundou's viewpoint on two sensitive matters: the Belinga concession and the Mbanie affair. Mamboundou said he opposes the Belinga contract ("a great deal for China, a bad deal for Gabon.") He also appears intent on making sure the Mbanie

affair remains in the spotlight: he has a press conference on the matter scheduled for this weekend. It is sometimes uncertain whether Mamboundou is speaking for a unified opposition, or simply for the UPG.

WALKLEY